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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 007775

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA CROCKER, NEA/NGA AND EUR/SE;
OSD FOR HRHODE;
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH;
DAMASCUS FOR WALKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2012

TAGS: PREL MARR TU IZ

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ: TURKMEN FRONT UNHAPPY WITH
OPPOSITION CONFERENCE PLANS, ACKNOWLEDGES MISTAKE IN
EQUATING BARZANI WITH SADDAM

REF: A. ANKARA 7550
B. ANKARA 7509
C. ANKARA 7148

(u) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch. Reasons: 1.5 (B and D).

Summary and Comment

¶1. (C) Operation Northern Watch POLAD met with Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) Ankara rep and Executive Committee member Dr. Mustafa Ziya November 1. Ziya complained the ITF wanted to be in the opposition conference steering committee and have ten percent of the seats at the conference, but a Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) veto was preventing this. He also objected to the KDP filling Turkmen conference slots with pro-KDP Turkmen who were ITF opponents and asked for USG help in turning the KDP around on these issues. Ziya acknowledged that hostile Turkmen rhetoric directed against KDP leader Masoud Barzani was unhelpful and painted the ITF as anti-Barzani, but not necessarily anti-Baghdad. He hoped to control the message better by getting himself appointed as the ITF rep responsible for external relations and press.
End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: The good news is that Ziya knows the ITF was out of line by letting some of its people use the "Barzani equals Saddam" slogan in the Turkish election campaign. They apparently just couldn't help themselves and the Turkish press was clamoring for such stuff. Hopefully, Ziya will be able to exercise more control over ITF public statements now that Turkish elections are behind us, especially if he gets designated as the ITF's official spokesman. The Assyrian example of convening all major Assyrian groups in London to decide for themselves how to apportion the Assyrian seats at the opposition conference strikes us as the best recipe to resolve the issue of individual Turkmen representation. We believe Washington should encourage the Turkmen to convene such a meeting in London in the near future to avoid bitter disagreements that are bound to draw Turkey into the fray and that could poison the conference's outcome. As things currently stand, Barzani will not discard the Turkmen who have stood by him, and the ITF will not sit at a table where those Turkmen are present. We expect Turkey to press hard on behalf of the ITF position. End comment.

ITF Pushes "Conditions" for Opposition Conf.

¶3. (C) On November 1, ONW POLAD met ITF Ankara rep Dr. Mustafa Ziya to discuss the opposition conference and ITF-KDP relations. Ziya had been in London in mid-October for meetings with the opposition conference steering committee. He said the ITF had three conditions: 1) ITF wanted to be in the steering committee; 2) ITF wanted to have a rep in each subcommittee; and 3) ITF wanted at least 10% Turkmen representation at the conference. Ziya claimed that five of the steering committee members he saw separately in London agreed to these conditions, but when the committee met as a group the KDP, whose reps had refused to see him in London, vetoed the changes. The committee then told Ziya that the ITF had to accept the committee's decision. Ziya told the committee that if the percentage of representation could not be changed, every group, rather than every individual, should have one vote. This, he said, would solve many problems for many groups. The ITF Executive Committee is writing a letter to the steering committee complaining about the status of arrangements (Ziya said ITF would provide a copy to Embassy

Ankara and NEA/NGA). Ziya also objected to the KDP filling limited Turkmen slots at the conference with non-ITF, pro-KDP Turkmen. Ziya told us the ITF needs the USG's help in getting the KDP to back down on these points.

14. (C) Ziya said that while he was in London, Iraqi National Congress (INC) leader Ahmed Chalabi had called the INC office from the US and told the INC staff to prepare for an INC General Assembly. It was unclear to Ziya when and where this might take place and who might provide the Assembly's funding.

Ziya Will Try to Stop "Barzani is Like Saddam" Rhetoric

15. (C) We showed Ziya a Turkish Daily News article from 10/22 (faxed to NEA/NGA) reporting an Iraqi Turkman demonstration in Istanbul where people chanted "death to Barzani, the enemy of Turkey" and held placards showing Barzani, Talabani and Saddam supported by the US trampling on the Iraqi Turkmen. We told him this did not help the cause of trying to get the Turkmen a seat at the serious table of Iraqi opposition, and added that the ITF's recent press statements sounded like they were mainly anti-Barzani, not anti-Baghdad. He acknowledged the problem and hoped it would disappear after the Turkish election campaign. Ziya said the TDN article was written by a man in Ireland who knows nothing about the real situation, and that the ITF had nothing to do with either the article (which calls the Turkmen of Iraq loyal to the Iraqi government) or the Istanbul demonstration.

In fact, Ziya related, he had told Turkish TV that such demonstrations were dangerous and would be used by the other parties inside northern Iraq against the Turkmen. Ziya told us that while the crowd at the demonstration contained only a few dozen Iraqi Turkmen, it was organized and attended by a few hundred Turkish MHP activists. "It was done for the Turkish election campaign," he said.

16. (C) Ziya insisted his public line has consistently been that the ITF had problems with the KDP, but that these could be solved via negotiations, which he hoped could start with the visit to northern Iraq of a Turkish MFA delegation in the near future. He told us that he had recently proposed to the ITF Executive Committee appointing him the sole point of contact with the media/external relations chief (something like the KDP's Hoshyar Zebari or the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's Sade Piri, he said). He said he would try to stop the "Barzani is as bad as Saddam" rhetoric coming out of some of the ITF's constituent ranks (including some Turkey-based leaders). Ziya said he understood that outside of Turkey such talk only hurts the ITF. He expected a decision on the creation of the new position within a few weeks, and said he would in any case press the ITF constituent organizations to stop the harmful rhetoric.

Ziya Explains Why ITF Didn't Attend Joint Assembly

17. (C) We asked Ziya why the ITF did not attend the October 4 and 7 joint assembly sessions in Irbil and Sulaymaniyah, after the GOT and we had weighed in hard to get the Turkmen Front invited. Ziya replied that ITF Chairman Sannan Aga told him the invitation came late the night before the first session, was not "official," and that all Iraqi Turkmen would have opposed him if he had attended. Ziya added that the ITF had a problem in principle with the other Turkmen who attended the sessions (those who work with Barzani in the regional administration). We told Ziya that, in our view, the ITF's decision not to attend the assembly sessions represented missed opportunities. Ziya then said that the ITF wanted to meet with the KDP to work things out but that the KDP consistently refused to sit with ITF leaders. He was confident that the KDP-ITF problems could be solved in a matter of weeks and that they need a period of media truce.
PEARSON